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The Occult Revival as Popular Culture: Some Random Observations on the Old and the Nouveau Witch

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IN HIS classic article on fashion, Edward Sapir noted that:

There is nothing to prevent a thought, a type of morality or an art form from being the psychological equivalent of costuming the ego. Certainly one may allow oneself to be converted to Catholicism or Christian Science in exactly the same spirit in which one invests in pewter or follows the latest Parisian models in dress (Sapir, 1937:143).

Although religion holds a somewhat exalted position in many of the prominent macro theories of societies (e.g., those of Durkheim, Weber, etc.), it is often a rather mundane phenomenon, satisfying a wide variety of idiosyncratic needs for society's many groups and their members. The functions of a religious phenomenon will often vary for its different actors and audiences, and they need not necessarily reflect a single fundamental fact or crisis of social life. This point is nicely exemplified by Ogden Nash's delightful poem describing the sequential religious affiliation of Mrs. Marmaduke Moore. He reminds us that her changes in religion might result from causes other than those of some set of central social-structural origins (e.g., anomie, status inconsistency). Describing her many conversions from Methodism to Bahai, he concluded:

When seventy stares her in the face
She'll have found some other state of grace.
Mohammed may be her Lord and Master
Or Zeus, or Mithros, or Zoroaster.
For when a woman is badly sexed,
God knows what god is coming next (Nash, 1945:12).

The revival of interest in the occult and the supernatural is a current example of religious events that some have seen as being of great cultural significance and as reflecting serious social conflicts and strains of macroscopic import. (For good examples of this alienation-argument, see Staude, 1970; Greeley, 1969. For a somewhat similar view, see Harris, 1970.) A wide variety of indicators shows that we are in the midst of a widespread boom of things occult. As *Time* magazine (1968:42) noted: "A mystical renaissance is evident everywhere, from television to department stores." In late 1969, *The Wall Street Journal* reported that the boom continued and "mysticism is becoming a big business. A New York book store specializing in the occult says sales have zoomed 100% in the past three years" (Sansweet, 1969:1; for the British counterpart, see Williams, 1970). In 1968, 169 paperback books dealing with occult topics were in print [see *Paperbound*

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Books in Print (June 1968), under the headings "Psychology: Occult Sciences," "Parapsychology," and "Astrology,"] and, by 1969, the figure had jumped to 519 books (see *Paperbound Books in Print*, October 1969). In 1969, 364 hardback volumes dealt with occultism, which represented an increase both from 261 volumes in 1968 and from 198 volumes in 1967 (Prakken and Shively, 1967, 1968, 1969). A final indicator of this boom has been the sales of Ouija boards. After some forty years of poor sales, companies reported over two million sold in 1967 (Pileggi, 1970:63), thereby outdistancing the sales of *Monopoly* (Buckley, 1968:31). (An excellent history of the Ouija and its family can be found in Jastrow, 1962:129–143. For a discussion of the mechanisms involved, see Rawcliffe, 1959:134–151; and for an interesting case study, see Wenger and Quarantelli, 1970. On the earlier Ouija board fads, see Sann, 1967:139–144.)

The revival of occultism has been heavily touted as (and, in large part, certainly does represent) an important part of the current youth culture (see Greeley, 1969; Levin, 1968; and Gams, 1970; and on the concept of "youth culture," see Berger, 1963). Certain facts and assumptions, however, indicate that a broad spectrum of persons has been involved in this boom. My own teaching experiences¹ and the wide variety of magazines now giving space to this subject (from *McCall's* and *The Ladies Home Journal* to *Playboy* and *Esquire*) show that many persons outside the youth culture are interested in the occult. A 1969 survey of *Fate* magazine readers, which then had about 94,000 monthly readers, showed that 88 percent of them were over 34 years old, 37.9 percent being over 55 years old (Consumer Communication Corporation).² A 1963 Gallup Poll showed that one in five persons reported some sort of sudden or dramatic "religious or mystic experience." The study further showed no relationship between the respondent's experience and his level of education (Gallup, 1963; for a detailed analysis of this report, see Bourque, 1969; and Bourque and Back, 1968). It is safe to assume that even though they were not sudden or dramatic, a great many other Americans have had comparable religious experiences. It is also likely that even though today's social scientists have only superficially examined the subject, a vast reservoir of magical and superstitious thought exists in the American population. (Such studies of magic in modern America would include Henslin, 1967; Hyman and Vogt, 1967; McCall, 1964; Lewis, 1963; Blumberg, 1963; Whitten, 1962; Vogt and Golde, 1958; Roth, 1957; Vogt, 1956; Simpkins, 1953; Levitt, 1952; Zapf, 1945–1946, and 1945; Belanger, 1944; Weiss, 1944; Passin and Bennet, 1943; Caldwell and Lundeen, 1937; Dudycha, 1933; Hurston, 1931; Grilliland, 1930; Wagner, 1928; Park, 1923; Conklin, 1919; and Shotwell, 1910.) These facts and assumptions plus the well-known concern held by the elderly about occultisms relating to healing and survival of bodily death (see Buckner, 1968)³ indeed

¹ In the fall of 1969, I offered an evening class for the Adult Education Center on "Witchcraft, Black Magic and Modern Occultisms." The course drew 225 registrants from a wide spectrum of age and background characteristics which, I think, reasonably represented the middle-class population (those able to afford the course-fee).

² *FATE's* circulation in 1969 was approximately 120,000 (Fuller, 1970).

³ The demographics of the readership of *FATE* magazine, a pre-revival periodical, indicate an older population. The publisher attributes this to the belief that "as people grow older, they become more interested in survival" (Fuller, 1970).

indicate that interest in the occult is not an unique phenomenon with the youth culture.

Despite the widespread interest in occultism throughout the population, this current revival seems to be primarily a youth phenomenon. Some facts support this claim. The mass media portray youth as adherents of occultism. Occult bookstores have emerged around the academic campuses. Even many institutions in the nation, including so-called Free-Universities, have offered numerous courses dealing with occult topics.

Empirical research on the prevailing attitudes of the occult among youths is nearly non-existent. During the past three years, my investigations of the national occult scene reveal four rather distinct foci of interest, foci sometimes intersecting but basically quite separate. Three major sources of data provided the basis for my interpretation of the integrated pattern of existing occult belief-systems: extensive readings in the available literature, interviews with hundreds of students, and interviews or exchanged communications with numerous major occult figures, writers, and publishers. The four major foci of occult interest currently dominating the youth culture are (1) astrology, (2) witchcraft-satanism, (3) parapsychology and extra-sensory perception, and (4) Eastern religious thought. Classified as a "waste-basket variety," a fifth category encompasses a large number of esoteric items of occult interest, including among others, prophets (Edgar Cayce, Nostradamus, etc.), strange monsters (sea serpents, snowmen, werewolves, vampires, etc.), unidentified flying objects,⁴ and many others.⁵ Because the interests in the fifth category either have small scope and influence or are in an actual state of decline,⁶ the interests in the four major categories represent the dominant factors or motifs currently in fashion. At times, these four interest-areas do intersect among some believers. (For example, some witches, as Sybil Leek, also believe in astrology.) This, however, is not necessarily the case and indeed is relatively uncommon.

Of the four major foci of occult interest, the first two are most clearly central in the current revival. Parapsychology does not seem to be undergoing any significant increase in popularity.⁷ Interest in Eastern religious thought seemingly passed its peak as a topic of mass interest when interest in Zen Buddhism, which the so-called "beat-generation" writers of the 1950's made popular, began to decline (for sociologically relevant works on this subculture, see Rigney and Smith, 1961; Moore, 1960; and Feldman and Gartenberg, 1958). Both parapsychology and Eastern religious thought act not as central values in the youth

⁴ A massive literature and following exist for the "flying saucer" phenomenon. (For two sociological investigations, see Buckner, 1968; and Warren, 1970.)

⁵ The variety of occult offerings is immense. A Delphic Society in California proposes the revival of the ancient pantheon. (An excellent survey of these esoteric groups is Mathison, 1960.)

⁶ An interesting decline of interest in unidentified flying objects would appear to have followed the lunar landings and the Condon report (Fuller, 1970).

⁷ Although scientific interest in ESP continues, a decline, at least in the United States, seems to be occurring in this area of occult interest; J. B. Rhine's departure from Duke University may have precipitated this decline. (For an excellent survey of the literature, see Hansel, 1966. For critical responses by parapsychologists to this very negative evaluation, see Eysenck et al., 1968.)

occult world, but as *bolsters* or legitimatizing linkages to the broader and more generally accepted cultural areas of science and religion. One becomes receptive to an analysis of witchcraft-satanism with their generally unacceptable magical elements if he remembers two facts. First, the current limits of scientific understanding have been highlighted by the parapsychologists conducting "respectable" laboratory investigations. Second, in the process of establishing their own identity, some proponents of Western philosophical naturalism may have become rather parochial in their own views toward the older and more mystical traditions of the East. I will now devote the rest of this paper to an analysis of these two major foci of occult interest currently dominating the scene—astrology and witchcraft-satanism.

Astrology

Certain existing indicators of occult preferences clearly reveal the predominant interest in astrology. In 1969, 252 or 68 percent of the 373 books printed on occultism dealt with astrology (Prakken and Shively, 1969).⁸ In 1969, 33 of 40 articles dealing with occultism covered the topic of astrology [in *Readers Guide to Periodical Literature* (New York: H. W. Wilson Co.), for January 17, 1969, to January 29, 1970]. Paperbound books on astrology increased from 35 in 1968 to 102 in 1969 (see *Paperbound Books in Print*, October 1969, June 1968). Even the popular press (Time, 1969; Jennings, 1970; Robinson, 1970; and Buckley, 1968) has widely reported the phenomenal growth of interest in this ancient pseudo-science (for good reviews of the scientific repudiation of astrology, see, Bok and Mayakkm, 1941; Thorndike, 1955; Hering, 1924:18–37; de Camp and de Camp, 1966:20–31; Lewinsohn, 1962:90–114; and, especially, Gauquelin, 1970); such interest has become a marketing bonanza. Twenty years ago only about 100 papers carried horoscope columns, but today 1200 of the 1750 daily newspapers regularly carry such columns (Buckley, 1968:31; and Jennings, 1970:104). Because of their public endorsement of astrology, a wide variety of celebrities, which range from Hollywood stars (e.g., Marlene Dietrich, Robert Cummings, Susan Hayward),⁹ to members of the political (e.g., Ronald Reagan)¹⁰ and intellectual (e.g., Marshall McLuhan)¹¹ communities, have added to its attractiveness to their admirers. The popular musical *Hair* with its hit song of *Aquarius* and its own well publicized company-astrologist gave special impetus to the movement (Buckley, 1968:136). The Dell publishing company alone had some 49 horoscope publications in press and sold over 8,000,000 copies of its annual astrological dopesheet in 1969 (Jennings, 1970:104). About 10,000 full-time and 175,000 part-time astrologers in The United States serve some 40,000,000 persons in their American audience (Jennings, 1970:154). One only has to look

⁸ Of these 252 volumes, 4 were astrology dictionaries and bibliographies and only 5 related to the early history of astrology.

⁹ Hollywood has long been a center for astrological counselors. (For an excellent survey of this phenomenon, see Abramson, 1969.)

¹⁰ Because of the advice of astrologer, Carroll Righter, Governor Reagan reportedly set his inauguration time at 12:30 A.M. (Jennings, 1970:154).

¹¹ "McLuhan . . . believes that for various reasons astrology may have worked better in antiquity than it does now" (Buckley, 1968:138).

around at the shops in any semi-urban community to see astrological recordings, calendars, ashtrays, hairstyles, sweatshirts, and thousands of merchandised items linked to the zodiac. As one leading figure in the occult world, who himself does not endorse astrology, succinctly put it: "The stars may affect no one, but astrology affects everyone" (LaVey, 1968).

How, then, are we to account for the renewed popularity of this ancient and scientifically discredited belief system? No one who is familiar with the rules of scientific evidence or with the history of both astrology and astronomy over the centuries can accept the interpretation of the manifest functions of astrology, that it represents a scientifically true explanation and predictive framework for understanding man and his actions. Of course, some followers of astrology claim acceptance of their "science" for just such reasons. Such rigid scientific justification, however, is rare among the practitioners. Most astrology-believers place their credence in their system for reasons, at least partly, beyond what they themselves see as a legitimate science. To them, the heart of the matter is not that they use science as the basis for their acceptance of astrology as truth but that science must catch up with their truth. We, thus, might look at the latent functions of astrological beliefs, both for the social system (group) in which they exist and for the needs of the social actors involved in the system.¹² One must, however, recognize that the involvements of those "into" astrology are quite varied. One can meaningfully speak of at least three, somewhat oversimplified and "ideal typical," levels of involvement. Each level of involvement manifests somewhat different consequences for the actors.

At the first, most superficial level of involvement, we find the occasional reader of the newspaper and magazine astrology-columns. This person knows next to nothing about the "mechanics" of astrology. From my interviews and preliminary explorations, I found that most of the middle-aged (over 35 years old) population who follow astrology fall into this category. These astrology-followers were largely present before the astrology-revival of these past five years. Because horoscopes do not normally take into account the subject's (client's) exact time and place of birth, those more advanced than are others in astrology perceive this level of astrology-believers as highly superficial. Even the noted newspaper-astrologer, Sidney Omarr, was quoted as conceding that "daily columns provide entertainment rather than enlightenment" (Buckley, 1968: 31). The overwhelming majority of astrology-believers fall into this first level. Consideration of the latent functions for the individual involved at the first level would have to take into account the following factors: (1) the familiarity with astrology, its ancient and pervasive character; (2) the quasi-scientific character of astrology that acts as legitimating astrology to those not scientifically critical but personally concerned about the present explorations of the heavens;

¹² I am here making the distinction between sociological functions (after Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown) and social-psychological functions (after Malinowski), that is, between the fulfillment of the needs of the social system and the fulfillment of the needs of the individual personalities within that system. The two can and do exist simultaneously. I will argue, however that, depending upon the degree of involvement of the astrology-believers, the functions of astrology will vary on these two levels. Instead of a detailed explanation of the functions of the current astrological boom, only an adumbration of its functions is given in the paper.

(3) the usually positive character of astrological advice that makes it ego-boosting; (4) the ego-directed attention of the advice; (5) the element of mystery, of the esoteric that makes the advice exciting and entertaining; (6) the ambiguity of the message that makes it amenable to interpretation and difficult to falsify; and (7) the self-fulfilling nature of many astrological predictions. (This phenomenon may operate in the following way: a person who reads that he is in good spirits becomes so, or a person who reads that he should be cautious acts so and then finds a justifying event.) Some latent functions on the group (societal) level might include the following factors: (1) tension-management of anxieties within the social system; (2) fulfillment of economic goals that the mass merchandising of an astrology-fad affords; and (3) the availability of a cognitive belief-system that transcends science and is "safe" from the sanctions of or overt conflict with the major religions. (This is true today, but it was not always so.)

At the second level of involvement with astrology, we find those people who have some knowledge of the "mechanics" of astrology. These people usually have their own personal horoscopes cast. They do this through a variety of ways, ranging from personal visits with a consulting astrologer to a computer-analysis of their horoscopes.¹³ Unlike those in the first level of involvement, the astrology-believers in the second level have some knowledge of the special language and of the astrological reasoning; they are able to speak about other people astrologically. Like those in the first level, most astrology-believers in the second level seek advice and predictions from their excursions into astrology.¹⁴ I have observed that *the astrology-believers in the second level primarily represent those of college-age, and this level has had the greatest relative increase during the current revival*. Some latent functions for the individual involved at the second level might include the following factors: (1) all functions available to those involved at the first level; (2) the enhancement of the *personal* and ego-gratifying character of the involvement; (3) an increased commitment to astrology [by means of the expense and trouble of getting a personal horoscope, by means of a direct interpersonal relation with the astrologer, and by means of a personal investment (dissonance) strongly motivating the person to act upon the belief-system]; and (4) the enhancement of the believer's self-esteem among his friends and colleagues. (This phenomenon operates in the following way: because of its special language, astrology is an excellent topic of conversation; because the believer can direct the substance of astrology to another's ego as well, he gains great interpersonal merit in his interactional process.) Some latent functions on the group (societal) level might include the following factors: (1) all functions available to those involved in the first level; (2) the creation and maintenance of an in-group cohesiveness and an out-group exclusion by means of the special language of astrology; and (3) the presence of a highly interpersonally binding

¹³ At this writing, Time Pattern Research Institute, Inc., in New York City, will run off a 10,000 word-horoscope in two minutes for twenty dollars.

¹⁴ This advice is often surprisingly good (Sechrest and Bryan, 1968). Apparently unknown to Sechrest and Bryan, mail order "astrologers" systematically churn out much of this "astrological" advice by means of rules that they find in a variety of privately published manuals made available to professional mentalists.

conversational framework that often centers around a highly personal and ego-centric discourse. (Astrology and psychoanalysis both share this and many other common features.)

At the third level of involvement with astrology, we find those people who have become really involved in the literature of the field and usually cast their own horoscopes. Until relatively recently, this level was composed of only a very small number of elderly people; it now consists of many youthful advocates. Persons involved this deeply in astrology are still comparatively few. (For example, the approximately 30,000 students at the University of Michigan have enough interest in astrology to support an occult-astrology bookstore; yet only about 20 such serious adherents are reportedly around that campus.) Unlike those in the first two levels of involvement, the astrology-believers in the third level are not primarily concerned with advice or prediction. For them, astrology represents a highly complex and symbolically deep conceptual scaffolding which offers them a *meaningful* view of their universe and gives them an *understanding* of their place in it. They use astrology as a means of establishing their identity (Klapp, 1969). They usually acknowledge the great difficulties in establishing any predictive statements from astrology. To them, astrology represents a world-view far more reminiscent of religion than of science. In fact, they most likely speak of their belief-system, not as a science like physics or astronomy, but as an art or as one of the "occult sciences." The latent functions for the individual involved at the third level may well include many of the features found in the first two rather superficial levels of involvement. The major latent function, however, is that the adept astrologer obtains an ideological integration of his self with his perception of the universe. Of course, other benefits may occur. He may, for example, become a leader in his astrology-oriented circle of friends. He may even become a professional astrologer and earn his living from his involvement; for the social actor, however, the central function is that the astrological belief-system operates as a grand conceptual-philosophical scheme. (Because the actor is aware of the consequences of his belief in astrology, this central function may now become manifest, not latent.) On the group (societal) level, this intensity of involvement may well act as a "sacred canopy" (see Berger, 1967) for the social group. Composed of only a few thousand astrology-believers, this level of involvement clearly follows the depiction of the astrological belief-system as a social reaction against the normlessness of modern life. It is at this level of involvement that we see the search for identity and for new sacred elements. We should, however, see these relatively extreme astrology-believers in their true perspective: they represent a very small minority of those involved in the massive revival of interest in astrology. I would argue, in fact, that the vast majority of those involved with astrology, those at the first two levels, take a highly irreverent, almost playful attitude toward astrology. To most of these people, astrology is fun; it is a non-serious, leisure-time element of popular culture, *not* a spiritual searching for Karmic meaning.

Witchcraft and Satanism

Witchcraft and Satanism follow astrology as the second most popular focus of current attention in occultism. The large number of recent popular books and

articles dealing with these subjects attests to this upsurge of interest in them.¹⁵ (Often these publications are reprints of much older volumes.) Although witchcraft and Satanism are commonly linked together, they actually represent very different belief-systems, and each has an existing variety of forms.

The alleged difference between so-called *white* versus *black* magic is one major distinction discussed in much of the occult literature. While white magic is supposed to be the use of magic for socially beneficent ends,¹⁶ black magic is supposed to be the use of magic for malevolent ends. Even though some ritual forms of black magic clearly involve calling upon such malevolent forces as the Devil or his demons, most magicians basically view magic as a value-free "technology-of-the-supernatural" (or *super-normal*, a term preferred by many magicians). They believe that their own motives really determine whether their use of magic is for good (white), or for evil (black). Most contemporary witches stress that they perform only white magic (e.g., Leek, 1968:3-5; or Holzer, 1969: 19) as an attempted antidote for the stereotypes usually portraying them as evil workers of the devil. The distinction between black and white magic is essentially a matter of the user's intent rather than of his technique.¹⁷

Contemporary witches usually do not consider themselves to be Satanists. Satanism is basically a worship of the Judaeo-Christian Devil, which is, at times, only a symbol and, at other times, very literally real. (Varying degrees of fundamentalism exist among Satanists. For these varieties, see Truzzi, 1972; and Lyons, 1970.) Practitioners in witchcraft do not usually view themselves as an heretical

¹⁵ A sample of the best of these articles would include Rascoe (1970); Newsweek (1970); Ward (1970); Bloxham (1970); Weir (1970); St. Albin-Greene (1969); Freedland (1969); Pageant (1967); Kobler (1966); Thomas (1966); Graves (1964); and Bone (1964).

This variation is not surprising because broad differences over the question of the existence of the Devil do exist among Christians. While 66 percent of the Roman Catholics in the United States apparently believe in the actual existence of the Devil, only 6 percent of the Congregationalists, 13 percent of the Methodists, and 31 percent of the Presbyterians believe in his existence. The Southern Baptists (92 percent) are the only major group that seemingly remain solid in their belief in an actual Devil. (See Glock and Stark, 1965:10.)

Some of the better (more informative) popular-audience or mass-market books on witchcraft and Satanism include Huson (1970); Crow (1970); Rohmer (1970); Steiger (1969); Robson (1969); Martello (1969); Holzer (1969); Seth (1969); Tindall (1967); Wallace (1967); Daraul (1966); Maple (1966 and 1965); Glass (1965); Valiente (1962); Wedeck (1961); Parrender (1958); and Hole (1957).

Recent books by witches include Leek (1968); Heubner (1969); and Gardner (1954 and 1959). A great many of these books and articles consist of interviews with witches (e.g., Holzer, 1969). Most of the above works dealing with contemporary witchcraft are notoriously unreliable. Many are apparently published as merchandise for a highly interested market. One of the best (worst) examples of such a work is Johns, 1970.

The major academic works on the West European witchcraft traditions would include Lea (1957); Kittredge (1956); Murray (1921); Lethbridge (1968); Baroja (1964); Michelet (1939); Rose (1962); and Robbins (1959).

¹⁶ This conception that magic is directed toward social, beneficial ends is at odds with the common, anti-social definition of magic found among many sociological theorists (e.g., Durkheim, 1961:58-63). Wax and Wax (1963) outline well the difficulty facing most current sociological and anthropological theory in dealing with empirical cases of magical practices.

¹⁷ As one of my traditional white witch informants put it: "Magic is like a knife. A surgeon can use it to perform an operation to save a life or a madman can use it to murder someone." The expression "white magic" became widespread after the journalist William Seabrook (1940) first used it. (For a fuller discussion of this subject, see Truzzi, 1972.)

off-shoot of Christianity, but Satanists do view themselves, either literally or symbolically (since many Satanists are atheists), as members in league with the Christian's Devil. Most witches perceive witchcraft as a folk tradition of magical beliefs. Many, if not most of them, further perceive it as an ancient, pre-Christian fertility religion¹⁸ that the Christian churches sought to suppress: primarily through the Catholic inquisitions and the Protestant witch trials.¹⁹ They believe that their religion became misrepresented and distorted as an heretical worship of the Devil. [For the early Catholic image, see Kramer and Sprenger, 1948. Most Catholics no longer accept the orthodox picture of the witch, but some Catholic scholars do; e.g., see Pratt, 1915, and Cristiani, 1962. The leading writer presenting the strictly orthodox (medieval) Catholic viewpoint in recent years was the late Montague Summers (1946, 1956, and 1958).] On the other hand, Satanists do often constitute a kind of inverted Christian sect. (Most of the presently vast literature on Satanism is quite unreliable. Some reliable sources include Hartland, 1921; Spence, 1960:123-124; Carey, 1941; and Murray, 1962. For the official views of the Church of Satan, centered in San Francisco, see LaVey, 1969. For good historical commentaries, see Carus, 1969; Langston, 1945; Coulange, 1930; and Garcon and Vinchon, 1929. And for the classic occult view on Satanism, see Huysmans, 1958; and Waite, 1896.) Oddly enough, most of history's Satanisms seemed to be direct outgrowths of the Christian churches' misrepresentations of early witchcraft practices. The inquisitors so impressed some individuals with the fantastic and blasphemous picture of Satanism that they apparently decided that they also would "rather reign in hell than serve in heaven."

Several different varieties seem to depict the non-heretical, non-Satanic or white witches. The major division of great importance to the sociologist is between those witches who are individual practitioners and those who belong to organized witch groups or *covens*. Most frequently encountered, the former variety represents the independent or solitary witches. This variety can be further subdivided into two, somewhat oversimplified, classes: (1) one represents those who, having learned the secrets of the art through some special kinship-relation to another solitary witch,²⁰ practice witchcraft as a culturally inherited art from kin; (2) the other represents those who, having invented their own techniques or having obtained their practices from the occult literature, practice witchcraft as self-designated witches. My investigations show that the vast majority of witches are in the second class: they belong to no organized group and have obtained their knowledge from their readings and conversations with others

¹⁸ The major exponents of the view were Murray (1921) and Gardner (1954). This is the dominant view among the non-Satanic, organized witch groups (*covens*) today.

¹⁹ Sociologists who have recently published studies on these trials include Erikson (1966), Curie (1968), and Macfarlane (1970). In his new appraisal of the celebrated Salem cases, Hansen (1969) repudiated the traditional histories of these trials. While he argued for the real existence of witchcraft in Salem, Erickson and Curie did not believe a real foundation existed for witchcraft in Salem (and, by implication, in other areas). Thus, he indirectly raised some serious questions about the accuracy of some elements in their sociological studies.

²⁰ This pattern is most often associated with rural areas, especially in the South. The "inherited" witchcraft usually consists of the acquisition of magical recipes or technology rather than the acquisition of a general religious belief-system. A common example would be the "inheritance" of dowsing abilities by a "water witch." (Cf., Vogt and Hyman, 1959; for typical cases, see Randolph, 1947:266.)

uninitiated into coven-held secrets. The typical person of this class is a young high-school or college-age girl who, for a variety of reasons, self-designates herself as a witch to her peers; because her status is attractive to her friends but elicits fear in her enemies, it produces many social rewards for her. Yet this type of witch is "illegitimate" in terms of the very criteria that she herself may accept for being a witch. Most of the major works on witchcraft state that before one becomes a true practitioner of the craft, he must obtain initiation into a coven and learn the group (coven) secrets. These secrets, however, are not available in such public works as the occultism-volumes in most public libraries or occult bookstores.²¹

A number of varieties exist among the organized white witch groups. A rather clear division seems to exist between the witch covens formed before and after the 1951 repeal of witchcraft-laws in England or, especially, after the 1954 publication of the late Gerald Gardner's first book on witchcraft (also, see Gardner, 1959, and Bracelin's biography on Gardner, 1960). Gardner's works were very influential in British occult circles, and many contemporary witches, sometimes called Gardnerites, received their credentials through Gardner's Witchcraft Museum on the Isle of Man.²² The question of legitimacy among British witches is still raging, each accusing the other of concocting his own rituals. *Pentagram: A Witchcraft Review*, the publication of the Witchcraft Research Association in London, prominently featured this debate in its first five issues (for an example of a lively exchange, see issue number 5, December 1965:18-19). The much publicized witch, Monique Wilson, who with her husband inherited Gardner's museum, has stated that she holds a secret register of covens existing around the world (Wilson, 1968). This, however, seems to include only the Gardnerite covens, which, according to Mrs. Wilson, numbered several hundred at that time. In 1969, another well publicized witch, Mrs. Sybil Leek, estimated to me that approximately 300 covens were then operating in the United States. The facts are that covens, especially those in existence before 1951, have little communication with one another. Members sometimes migrate from an area and join or begin a new coven, but no central hierarchy or witchcraft-organization actually exists. Except for Mrs. Wilson and Mrs. Leek, most witches know little about those in the other parts of the country. These women are somewhat unusual because their extensive publicity and travel about the world have brought them into contact with a great many witches wanting interaction with them. It is, therefore, impossible to obtain any sort of accurate estimate of the number of covens now in operation. Because a great number of new covens did begin after 1951, they certainly appear to represent the bulk of the *known* witchcraft-groups about which we read today. Even though more could exist, I did locate three

²¹ Of course, numerous books allege to give such group secrets. All coven witches whom I have interviewed and whose interviews I have read deny this.

²² From his museum, Gardner apparently ran some sort of diploma-mill for witches. He either initiated or was associated with many of the "Professional" British witches who have been greatly publicized in the United States. (For some very enlightening articles that suggest some of the financial motivations behind Gardner's efforts in reviving witchcraft, see Graves, 1964; and Weir, 1970. For a critical examination of Gardner's writing, see Rose, 1962.) Because of Gardner's success, at least five other witchcraft museums now exist in Great Britain and the United States. An American Gardnerian witch-anthropologist runs one of these, the Buckland Museum of Witchcraft and Magick (Buckland, 1970).

pre-1951 covens in Michigan. I thus estimate that at least 150 such traditional covens probably exist in Great Britain and the United States.

According to Murray, the maximum number of persons in a coven is thirteen: Thus, Great Britain and the United States probably can claim no more than 1950 coven members. These cultists represent a rather small part of the mass market currently devouring the many marketable witchcraft items and books. Coupling the number of coven members with that of the solitary witches (many of whom are really not very serious about witchcraft) still leaves us with a relatively small number of witches in the United States, the maximum being probably less than 3000. Like their interest with astrology, the popular interest of the general public toward this form of occultism is very superficial. From my observations of many people's reactions toward witches during public occasions,²³ I know that most people show interest in meeting a witch for the novelty rather than for any occult enlightenment. Like astrology, witchcraft also represents a play-function for the major portion of its current popular audience.

Like the witches, the Satanists also represent two distinct types of individuals: those acting as solitary agents and those operating in groups. We know next to nothing about the former. If some individuals in the world believe that they have made contractual arrangements with the Devil, then they probably would prefer that this not be widely known: this seems likely, especially if they are really doing evil things. Much diversity exists among the Satanic groups; these groups have at least four major varieties. Probably the least frequent, the first variety represents Satanic groups who follow some non-heretical (to them) interpretation of Christianity in which Satan is perceived as an angel still to be worshipped. These may represent some sort of Gnostic tradition which the members claim to follow.²⁴

A second variety about which one can read a great deal in the "soft-core" pornographic literature (e.g., Moore, 1969) consists of sex clubs that incorporate Satanism and some of its alleged rituals. Here we find, as an attraction or embellishment, the celebrated but usually artificial "black mass" (for the best work on this topic, see Rhodes, 1954). Many of these groups are sado-masochist clubs or flagellation societies.

Probably more frequent than the previous two, a third variety of Satanic group is an outgrowth of the current narcotics or "acid-culture" now found in various parts of the country [even though the author seems to confuse it with traditional Satanism, Burke (1970) presents a good description of one of these groups]. Epitomized by the much publicized Charles Manson group that allegedly killed Sharon Tate in 1969, this sort of group has received much publicity. It is, however, much more rare than the newspaper headlines would imply. More importantly, most of these groups are almost completely untraditional, and they make up their brand of Satanism as they go along (Burke, 1970; and Kloman,

²³ Often I take a witch with me when I lecture, and I have accompanied them when they lectured and met the public. I generally found this reaction during my own promotional talks for the sale of my witchcraft-cookbook (Truzzi, 1969).

²⁴ A good example of this sort of "white-Satanism" is a small group in Toledo, Ohio, who practices this under the leadership of Herbert A. Sloane. (See Eckman, 1969; St. Albin-Greene, 1969; and in Steiger, 1969:16-21, a lengthy interview with Sloane.)

1970). Like the sex club, their central focus is not occultism at all; in their case, it is narcotics. Ironically enough, many traditional Satanists commonly complain that the sex and acid cultists give a "bad name" to "real Satanism."

Clearly dominant today, the fourth variety of Satanic group consists of members of the Church of Satan in San Francisco. High Priest Anton Szandor LaVey²⁵ founded this church, which is, in fact, a church, not a cult.²⁶ Only LaVey knows the exact number of members in the Church of Satan, but on numerous occasions he has stated that over 7000 were contributing members.²⁷ He gave this figure before mid-1969: since then, LaVey's book *The Satanic Bible* has had national circulation (125,000 copies in its first of now four printings), and two movies that prominently feature the Church of Satan have been released nationally. The figure of 7000 appears reasonable, if not conservative,²⁸ for several reasons; because LaVey does remarkable public relations work and because *Rosemary's Baby*, the movie with which he was associated, has been a great success, the Church of Satan has received vast international publicity over the past five years.

The church has been remarkably successful during its short life. Although it still depends heavily upon the charisma of its founder, it is hierarchically governed²⁹ and now has two other churches (Grottos) in the Bay Area plus a number of still secret (to the general public) branches scattered around the country. By the end of 1971, LaVey hopes that Grottos will exist in every state of the Union. At the current rate of growth, achievement of his goal is not impossible.

²⁵ Founded in 1965, the church claims that it really represents a direct connection with the authentic Satanic traditions of the past. Some do not believe that this authentic tradition reflects the history of Satanism. Like the white witches, Satanists also complain that their enemies (generally, the Catholics) have published wild distortions about them.

In the "introduction" to *The Satanic Bible*, Burton H. Wolfe (LaVey, 1969:13-19) describes well the origins of the Church of Satan and the background of Anton LaVey. LaVey gives his views on a variety of topics not only in *The Satanic Bible* but also in his weekly column, "Letters from the Devil," which appeared until 1970 in *The National Insider* and now appears in *The Exploiter*. In addition to these public-policy statements, the Church of Satan produces for its membership a variety of information-bulletins and a newsletter, *The Cloven Hoof*.

²⁶ Four sociological criteria determine that the Church of Satan is not a cult but a church: (1) it is very large; (2) it is bureaucratically organized and hierarchically governed; (3) people become members of the church only through complex testings and initiations; and (4) the success of the church no longer centers around its founder's charisma. The government also has given the Church of Satan legal recognition of its church status for tax and other purposes. (For an excellent discussion of the distinction between cult and church, see Nelson, 1968.)

²⁷ Contributing members belong to the lowest membership-level in the Church of Satan. Although they receive their membership-card, they are not involved in the rituals or ceremonies of the church. The six hierarchical levels of membership in the church include (1) Contributing Member, (2) Active Member, (3) Witch or Warlock, (4) Wizard or Enchantress, (5) Satanic Master or Sorcerer or Sorceress, and (6) Magus (High Priest). (Cf., LaVey, 1970.)

²⁸ During my visits to the headquarters in the summer of 1970, I observed that they receive a large volume of mail. Even if only a small percentage represented mail from new persons seeking membership, the volume itself reinforced my opinion of the accuracy of the figure.

²⁹ The secret governing body of the Church of Satan is called the Order of the Trapezoid. Pastors or priests of the Church of Satan are called Magister Cavernus or Master or Mistress of the Grotto. (Cf., LaVey, 1970.)

Because contributing members pay an initial fee of twenty dollars for their life-time membership, the church has a relatively prosperous economic beginning.

Although the Church of Satan believes in the practice of magic, it simply defines magic as "obtaining changes in accordance with one's will."³⁰ The church perceives magic not as supernatural (i.e., forever scientifically inexplicable), but simply as supernormal (i.e., not yet fully understood by science but amenable to eventual scientific explanation). The church actively rejects spirituality and mysticism of any sort; it espouses an elitist, materialist, and basically atheistic philosophy. Satan constitutes a worship of one's own ego. Unlike most atheisms, the position of the Church of Satan is that these symbolic entities are powerful and indispensable forces in man's emotional life and that these forces are necessary conditions for the success of greater (Ritual) Magic.

In its major features, the Church of Satan takes the position of extreme Machiavellianism and cynical-realism toward the nature of man. It has many philosophical parallels with philosophies as divergent in sophistication as the Superman views of Friedrich Nietzsche and the Objectivist ideals of Ayn Rand.³¹ Its major feature, however, is its emphasis upon the importance of myth and magic and upon their impact in a world of people who can still be manipulated through such beliefs and emotions. This Satanist, then, is the *ultimate pragmatist*.³²

This predominant form of Satanism does not represent a new mysticism at all. It not only denies the existence of anything supernatural or spiritual, but it even condemns any narcotics, hallucinogens, or other agents that might act to separate rational man from his material environment. This Satanist does not seek escape from reality; he wishes full control of reality and is even willing to use all forces—including irrational elements—that help him in achieving his desired ends. Unlike the acid-culture Satanist who seeks identity through mysticism and other levels of "consciousness," this Satanist is very much opposed to the hippie culture of acid and altruism.³³

Thus, I argue that, like those interested in astrology, the major followers of Satanism represent not a search for a new spiritual meaning, but only a disenchantment with religious orthodoxy.

Conclusion

How are we to assess this rising tide of interest in the occult? I have shown three major facts in this paper. First, the interest in the occult is multidimensional, and it is not the simple, integrated, and consistent "bag" that many, especially

³⁰ This agrees with the definition of the well-known 20th Century magician, Aleister Crowley, whom others often mistakenly accused of being a Satanist. (Cf., Crowley, 1929:xii.)

³¹ Because of its positivistic stance and of its emphasis on ritual, the Church of Satan is remarkably parallel with the Positive Religion begun by Auguste Comte.

³² It is not insignificant that a magical ritual is usually termed a *working*.

³³ As a result, many conservative, anti-hippie persons have been strongly attracted to Satanism. The Church of Satan is elitist, but it has no political ideology or preference for a particular economic system. Some authoritarian personalities are especially attracted to the Church of Satan; in some of the recent church literature, a rising note of appeals to patriotism has occurred.

the writers in the popular press, have described it to be. Second, many persons involved in the following of today's occultisms are not the simple identity-seeking variety that some have portrayed them to be; these occultisms serve a variety of functions quite apart from offering new normative structures as an escape from alienation for the anomie. Third, most of those involved in supporting the current occult revival have a relatively superficial connection with it, a connection that is usually more one of play than one of seriousness. For most Americans, the involvement in the occult is a leisure-time activity and a fad of popular culture rather than a serious religious involvement in the search for new sacred elements.³⁴

Dr. Donald Kaplan has made a very insightful observation about astrology:

It's pop science . . . It has the same contempt,
in a playful way, for science that pop art
has for academic art (Quoted in Buckley, 1968:133).

I believe that we may even go further and refer to the mass version of occultism as *pop religion*. I would argue that it shows a playful contempt for what many once viewed seriously (and some still view thusly). I further would argue that the current mass interest in occultism represents, in fact, a kind of victory over the supernatural. What we are seeing is largely a demystification-process of what were once fearful and threatening cultural elements. Most significant is the very playfulness in the attitudes of most of the people involved in the occult revival. What were once fearful and awe-inspiring dark secrets known only through initiation into arcane orders are now fully exposed to the eyes of Everyman.

I illustrate this point by the example of the probable contemporary reaction to the allegation that a house in the neighborhood is haunted. Years ago, few would dare enter the house; all would whisper in fear about it. Now, such an allegation would bring a rush of inquisitive teen-agers who desire to spend the night there just to see the ghost. Would it be proper to interpret this direct interest as a renewed belief in ghosts? It is precisely because we no longer believe in the fearsome aspects of the occult that we are willing to experiment with them. Most of those who would willingly draw a proper pentagram on the floor to invoke a demon would do so precisely because they do not really believe that some Devil's emissary who might just pluck their souls down to Hell would possibly ever visit them. If we fully believed in demons, we certainly would not want to call them up.

This assessment does not deny that a growth has occurred in the number of true believers in the occult. It also does not deny that other non-occult phenomena, which indicate a growing number of persons seeking new religious meanings, have occurred. Certain factors, however, would alone cause an ex-

³⁴ We can find an interesting parallel between this debate and the popular interpretations of the recent folksong revival (late 1950's and early 1960's). Many commentators interpreted this revival as the alienated modern youth's search for traditions and for roots in our historical heritage. For most persons, it was nothing of the sort; it simply reflected some of the special functions that are very much like those of astrology today. In fact, the folksong revival and the ukelele fad of forty years ago bore marked similarities.

pected increase in occult activity: (1) the increase in our general population, (2) some disillusionment with the dominant religions, (3) our lack of fear of the occult or an involvement with it, (4) the present lack of social sanctions against involvement with the occult, and (5) the increased saliency of the occult resulting from the revival itself. *I must stress that I am concerned more with the mass character of the occult than with its small but significant minority of serious advocates.* As long as these mass phenomena represent a playful and non-serious confrontation with the supernatural elements, they then represent a possible cleansing or purging of the old fears and myths still present in our society. The more we eliminate these old fears and myths, the more we develop a naturalistic rationalism, a scientific view of the universe.

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